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Secretary, chief of staff: A higher calling awaits

by Master Sgt. Rick Burnham, Air Force Print News



Gen. John P. Jumper

WASHINGTON — When he took the reins of the U.S. Air Force on Sept. 6, Chief of Staff Gen. John Jumper hardly could have imagined what the future would hold. That a ruthless band of terrorists would attack in less than a week ... that he and his wife, Ellen, would attend a stirring presidential address to the Congress, preparing the nation for war on terrorists everywhere ... that the Air Force would likely play a key role in that war.

Yet, those were the realities as the new chief of staff spoke before a group of more than 200 Air Staff officer, enlisted and civilian people Sept. 21 at the Pentagon. The general, formerly commander of Air Combat Command at Langley Air Force Base, Va., was introduced by Dr. James Roche, secretary of the Air Force.

“The events of last week opened up a period for us in the Air Force where we have to adapt what we do well to the circumstances and threats we face,” said the secretary. “I can tell you that we are blessed that we have a terrific team, and a terrific uniformed leader in John Jumper, to get the job done. I have the greatest confidence in him, and I think, together with you, he will serve our country very well in the years to come.”

Following his introduction by the secretary, Jumper spoke of the events of the week before, saying that the world changed for everyone on Sept. 11.

“Once again, airmen stepped forward and responded that day in a heroic way,” he said. “We’re in a different mode. The president said it better than anyone else could — we are going to march forward in a very determined way.”

The U.S. Air Force, he added, is ready for the challenge.

“We were on a transformational path already,” he said. “In 1997, General Ryan said we’re going to take this AEF idea and make it work for the whole Air Force. So we’ve been in this period of transition for an extended period of time, and in doing so we’ve made ourselves ready for the events that confront us today.”

It helps, he added, that the entire country is now once again behind the U.S. armed forces, with a single objective in mind: eradicate terrorism and the people and organizations who generate it. Sitting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff during President Bush’s Sept. 20 address to Congress, he saw firsthand the solidarity behind this most important cause.

“If there is any one place where you can feel the power of the nation at work, it’s in that body,” he said. “And what you saw was a very diverse group of people come together behind the president.”

The president’s speech, he said, was extremely effective, for a very simple reason.

“His heart is in this,” Jumper said. “You get the feeling there is a passion involved in this ... there is nothing clinical about it. Of course, we’re used to that. We do business on that basis all the time, or we would not be wearing the blue suit. But the nation has it now. You get this profound sense that we have just crossed this very difficult bridge ... civilians are now as much a target as people in uniform. It’s frightening, but it’s also galvanizing.

“The whole nation is looking at us in uniform to do the nation’s business. Is there any higher calling than that? I don’t think so.”

Then, turning to Roche, “Mr. Secretary, I am proud to be a part of this team. We have before us today, the greatest Air Force in the world. And we are soon going to be able to demonstrate that fact once again. We will soon have to go into harm’s way once again, and the men and women of the U.S. Air Force are going to make it happen. It is going to be magnificent, because we’re going to do it standing side-by-side.”

Down the road, the general said, today’s airmen are going to look back at this time with pride.

“The things you tend to look back on are the things most important to you,” he said. “I can’t remember every year I got a pay raise, but I remember the 11th of September and I’ll remember the events ahead of us today.”. @

